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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV AND DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM VM](#) [ETMIN](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)

SUBJECT: MFA Delivers Information Sheet on Hoa Hao, Mennonites, Protestant churches

Reftel: A) HCMC 825 B) HCMC 762 and previous

1. (SBU) MFA Americas Department Deputy Director Nguyen Ba Hung called in Pol/C on August 12 to hand over an information sheet on recent incidents involving the Buddhist Hoa Hao Church (Ref A), the Mennonites (Ref B) and Protestant churches in Vietnam's Southwest. Hung said that the GVN is concerned about a "campaign" being waged by forces against Vietnam that seek to harm its reputation and impede relations with the United States. The GVN is thus attempting to fight back by providing as much information as possible in a timely manner to counter propaganda and fabrications. Text of the GVN's information sheet follows in paragraph 2.

2. (SBU) Begin text of GVN information sheet (unofficial Embassy translation).

Rejection of slanderous information regarding Vietnam's suppression of Hoa Hao and Protestantism.

(1) During the past week, RFA, BBC, etc., continually carried distorted information about Vietnam's violation of religious freedom, especially its suppression of Hoa Hao and Protestant followers in Vietnam's southwestern provinces. They cited fabrications by several Hoa Hao Buddhists, especially Le Quang Liem and the group of Catholic priests Nguyen Van Ly, Chan Tin and others who denounced Vietnam for its suppression, detention and torture of a number of Hoa Hao monks and followers in An Giang and Dong Thap Provinces. They even accused Vietnamese police of torturing to death three Hoa Hao followers and severely injuring seven others after they were arrested for spreading information that many Hoa Hao followers had burned themselves on August 5, 2005, and are currently on a hunger strike.

(2) The Hoa Hao Situation: On June 16, 2005, investigative authorities initiated a formal investigation of a case of "disturbing public order" in accordance with Article 245 of the Penal Code. On August 5, 2005, the investigative police of An Giang and Dong Thap Provinces initiated formal investigations of and then put under detention six suspects, namely Nguyen Van Dien, To Van Manh, Tran Van Ut, Vo Van Buu, Mai Thi Dung (for disturbing public order) and Vo Van Thanh Liem (for purposely harming others' health). These suspects are all Hoa Hao Buddhists, who had assembled more than 40 followers in Nhon My Commune, Cho Moi District, An Giang Province, and disturbed public order, which made local residents indignant. They even asked several individuals to have gasoline available and threatened to burn themselves. These acts violated the law and the formal investigation into the case against the suspects was conducted in line with procedures stipulated in the Criminal Procedures Code.

Two extremists, Tran Van Ut and Vo Van Buu, after resisting law enforcement officials, used gas to burn themselves. They were immediately taken to An Giang Provincial General Hospital for emergency care, but Ut, who suffered third degree burns, died on August 8, while Vo Van Buu is still under treatment in An Giang Hospital. That said, only one person died rather than four, as alleged in the press. Furthermore, no one was tortured to death as reported by Le Quang Liem, RFA and BBC over the past several days.

-- While the arrest warrants against the aforementioned six individuals were being executed, three other individuals, Vo Van Thanh Long, Nguyen Thanh Phong and Nguyen Thi Ha took action against law enforcement officials, pouring gas onto the road and lighting it on fire to prevent the police from arresting the prisoners as well as preventing the police from helping those who had set themselves on fire. Because of such acts, they were arrested as well. In short, seven people are being detained, one has died because of self-immolation, and one is being treated for injuries from self-immolation.

-- Le Quang Liem is not being detained. He has not been prosecuted. The elements described above were detained because of allegations of "disturbing public order".

(3) The Mennonite Situation: The People's Committee of

District 2 of Ho Chi Minh City recently demolished of part of a house illegally constructed by Nguyen Hong Quang on public property. The demolished area is 37.2 square meters. Apart from Quang's family, six other families in the area constructed buildings on public property, but they carried out the demolition themselves as requested by the competent authorities. Quang's family did not follow instructions, which prompted the forced demolition. That was a common practice, which was done in compliance with legal provisions regarding illegal construction on public property. Allegations that the Government demolished and disassembled Menonite Protestant chapels are ill-willed fabrications. The People's Committee of District 2 has actually informed the US Consulate General of the incident.

(4) Protestantism: RFA's and BBC's reporting of the incident has been one-sided and is not objective, which is based on fabrications and distorted allegations by a group of anti-Vietnam extremists. News about forced renunciations by Protestants in Long An and Kien Giang are distorted allegations aimed at staining Vietnam's image and its policies of respecting freedom of religious practice. Vietnamese laws, namely the Ordinance on Religion, the Government Decree guiding the implementation of the Ordinance on Religion and the Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism contain stipulations that ban forced denunciation of religious faith. Those documents have been widely disseminated to local administrations and residents.

End text of information sheet.

MARINE